

CHURCH FIRES AND RACISM AND FINANCES

July 12, 1997 (David W. Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, www.wayoflife.org) - Since January 1995, there have been 429 suspicious fires at houses of worship in the United States. Although only 162 of these were at predominantly black churches, and although more than one-third of those arrested for the fires at black churches have been black people, and although the intensive National Arson Task Force investigation into these fires has concluded that there is no racial conspiracy, and although the massive task force of 450 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers investigating the fires has demonstrated that most are the product of simple vandalism, the church burnings have been used by some as a convenient means whereby they can publicize their idea that that the country is literally awash with ugly and violent racism. They are using the church arsons to promote their agenda for more governmental involvement in people's lives and for more socialistic redistribution of wealth and for the perpetuation of the welfare state.

Though very little has been done to raise funds nationally to rebuild the white churches which have been destroyed in these fires (I have not heard of any such effort, in fact), massive efforts have gone into rebuilding the black churches. The \$8.5 million raised by the National Council of Churches, for example, is going only to churches allegedly damaged by arson attacks by white racists. We find this a strange disparity on the part of those who claim to be racially color blind. We have observed that those who focus on the sin of racism tend to promote racism of the grossest sort and tend to divide the races and tend to see everything in terms of race.

WHERE IS THE MONEY GOING?

We have been interested to observe the various fundraising efforts to rebuild black churches. In researching dozens of news reports, we have obtained the following statistics on funds raised --

\$8.5 million -- National Council of Churches

\$1 million -- Promise Keepers

\$3 million -- an estimate of funds raised by various other organizations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Christian Coalition

\$4 million -- an estimate of the value of materials which have been donated

\$2 million -- an estimate of the amount in individual donations which have been received directly by the churches

TOTAL ESTIMATED FUNDS RAISED = \$18.5 million

We admit that the total amount is only a rough estimate of the amount which has been given to rebuild the black churches, but if this figure errs, it errs on the low side. The figures are based directly upon published news reports.

What about the insurance on these churches? According to a wide-ranging survey done by USA Today in December 1996, 94% of the churches were insured. The average insurance settlement was \$68,000, whereas the average amount of damages was \$138,000. Thus the average shortfall was \$70,000 per church (USA Today, Dec. 23, 1996).

Let's put all of these figures together. There have been 162 black churches victimized by arson attack. Of course, not all of these attacks resulted in complete loss of the building. Based on the

USA Today survey, roughly 10 of those churches had no insurance. If the average loss was \$138,000, the total for these uninsured churches would have been \$1.4 million. The other 152 churches would have had a shortfall of roughly \$10.6 million after settlement with insurance companies. The total uninsured loss for the 162 churches would have been roughly \$12 million. As we have seen, far more than this has been raised by the various organizations mentioned. The \$18.5 million which has been donated or pledged, would provide an average of more than \$114,000 to each of the black churches which has suffered an arson attack.

In addition to this, \$22 million has been set aside by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide loans to the churches.

We are curious. Where is all this money going?

THE LORD IS OUR HELPER

If these churches are the Lord's churches, they don't need the government's help. They don't need the help of the unscriptural ecumenical organizations which are rushing to their aid. We enjoyed the testimony of one of the black pastors who experienced an arson attack. He "described the breadth of his community's support -- including donated pianos, organs and manual labor -- and told discouraged fellow pastors they shouldn't give up. 'In our case, help was knocking on our door constantly. We never solicited. We never asked. The help is still coming.' He said he wanted colleagues to know help is out there. 'The Lord has blessed us with an opportunity to ... go back into our church without a lot of the problems I hear other pastors are having'" (Daniel Donaldson, Salem Missionary Baptist Church, Salem, Georgia, Associated Press, June 10, 1997).

Amen.

"In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm 56:4).

"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6).

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, THE LORD IS MY HELPER, AND I WILL NOT FEAR WHAT MAN SHALL DO UNTO ME" (Hebrews 13:5,6).